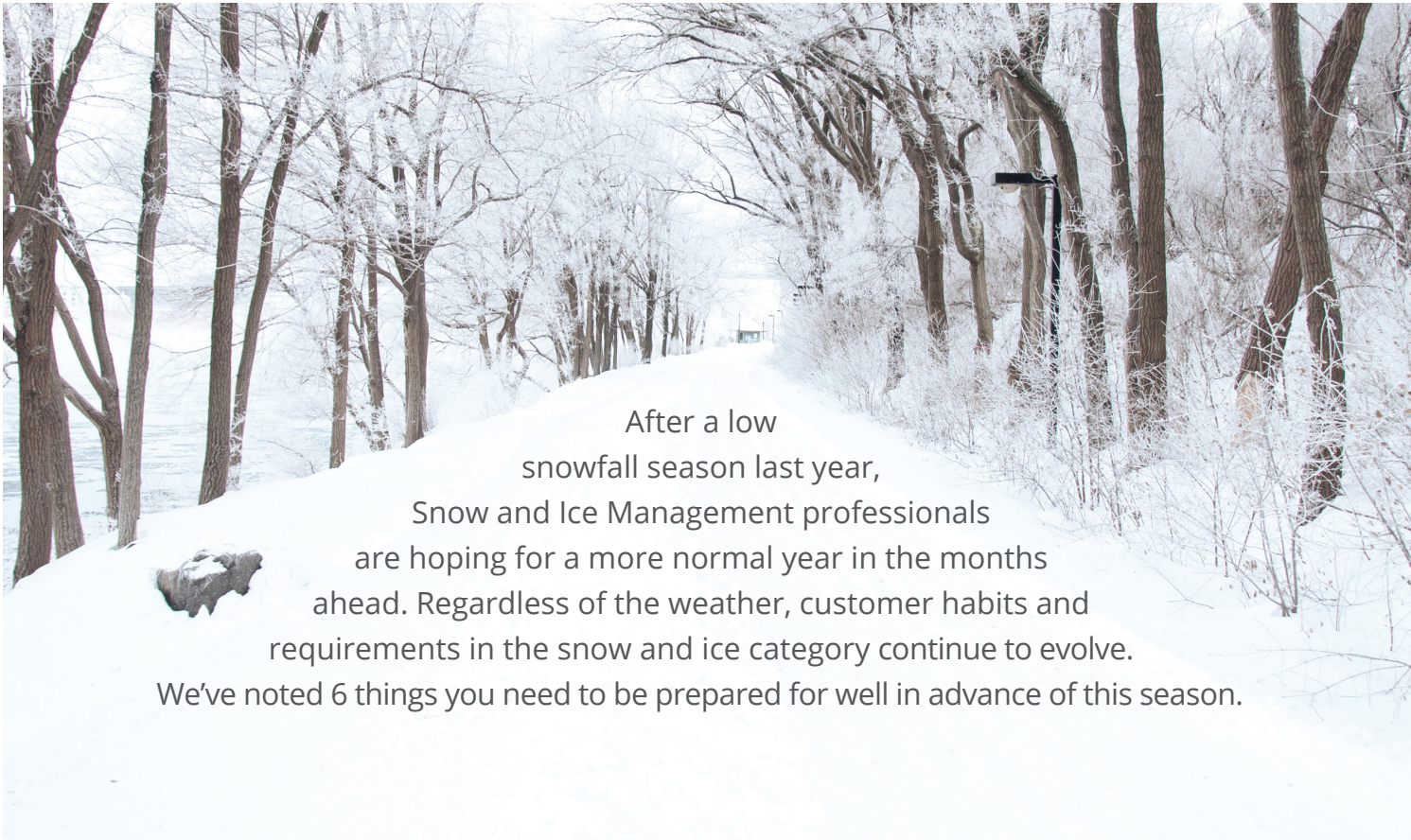


6 WAYS TO TAKE THE HASSLES OUT OF SNOW SEASON



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After a low snowfall season last year, Snow and Ice Management professionals are hoping for a more normal year in the months ahead. Regardless of the weather, customer habits and requirements in the snow and ice category continue to evolve. We've noted 6 things you need to be prepared for well in advance of this season.

1 Start Marketing Early to Secure the Best Contracts

The proactive snow and ice contractor will always have a better chance at a successful season. Here's why: First, the early-bird contractor grabs the best accounts. The best accounts offer the best revenue opportunities with the least amount of hassles. Start your marketing push immediately to get contracts booked with your target accounts. Second, after a mild winter last year, customers are not motivated, so you're going to need to work harder to get agreements signed. (Economists refer to this reliance on recent experiences to judge the urgency of future purchases the "recency bias". Unfortunately customers underestimate the need for your services in the months ahead!)

2 Manage Risk by Diversifying Your Contract Types

Which contractors did the best last season? Surveys show it was the ones who had a broad mix of pricing and contract strategies. It is much easier to control your risk—of either a rough or light winter—by having customer agreements that include a mix of pricing structures.

Leading contractors tell us that they aim for a mix of agreements based multiple billing structures: one-fee-for-the-season, time and material and per event rates. Typically each of these include different snowfall triggers.

3 Get Better at Customer Communications

Mismanaging snow event communications can destroy loyal customer relationships. Customers expect to hear from you when things happen. Failing to set up proactive communications puts relationships at risk, and that can impact both snow season and landscape season.

Great communication helps demonstrate the value you provide and the care you take. Think of it as subtly pointing out the good work that you're doing. Start by sending automated notifications of when a crew has visited a property. Most often, these can be sent directly from your snow management software using email. (Proactively offering email validation of service can reduce customer requests for more costly paperwork or photographic requirements)

Don't hide when service failures occur. If you fail to plow a property based on your contractual trigger or if you forget to plow a property entirely, immediately contact the customer to let them know the issue. You don't want them to call you angry. Mistakes are forgiven, arrogance or indifference is remembered.

4 Take Steps to Manage Potential Liability Claims

Consumers are expressing growing frustration with damage to plants and structures from poor-quality or incorrect ice melting products. Don't risk the damage to your reputation or potential liability from selecting the wrong product. Ask your Central representative about the right blends to meet your application needs.

Contractors also are facing an escalating rate of liability claims from alleged slip-and-fall incidents. Tackle this growing challenge in two ways. First, improve record keeping. Document your visits with software and/or GPS. Have proof of what work was done and when it was done. Second, establish the customer's requirements for "clean surfaces". Some clients expect to see clear blacktop all winter. Other clients just want the heavy snow removed and don't care about perfection. The client's choices (and assumption of liability therein) need to be documented.



5 Get Ahead of the Winter Labor Pinch

We know you're already feeling the pinch in finding summer landscape help. Get ready for the same challenges for winter help. Experts are telling us that the biggest challenge this winter will be finding and keeping shovelers. Connect early with your regulars and start looking to build a pool of reservists. You know the drill—the job looks great until the worker actually does it for a few days. Plan for a deep bench so you can deal with the attrition.

Similarly, get subcontractors signed on sooner rather than later. 60% of top snow and ice management contractors use subcontractors to manage the peaks of large events. Having reliable subcontractors on call reduces your need for extra equipment and extra manpower when the big storms hit. Of course, you pay much more for this peak capacity, but it keeps your overall overhead lower.

6 Review Your Equipment and Perform Preventative Maintenance

The worst time to have an equipment failure is in the middle of a snow event.

Now is the time to conduct an audit of your snow and ice management equipment to be sure you have the best performing resources before the season begins?

Start by evaluating the equipment you have. Do you have the right mix of resources to manage the contracts you're pursuing? Do you have aging resources that are due for replacement? Which pieces of equipment gave the most problems last season?

Decide now whether to repair or upgrade/replace. It's also a good time to check shovels, spreaders and other manual equipment and make a list of how many to order for your shoveling crews.

Next, for the equipment you will keep, schedule complete pre-season maintenance and overhaul. This is particularly critical for equipment with small engines like skid steers and snow blowers. Change spark plugs and air filters. Replace fluids. Update tires. Ask us if you need a checklist.

Finally, equip every vehicle with a winter safety and repair kit for the road. Include first aid supplies, extra repair parts, basic tools, safety flares / triangles and snow shovel.



Central carries everything you need for a successful snow season, including ice melt, rock salt, snow shovels, spreaders, snow removal equipment and more. Ask your local representative for a copy of our winter products guide.



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